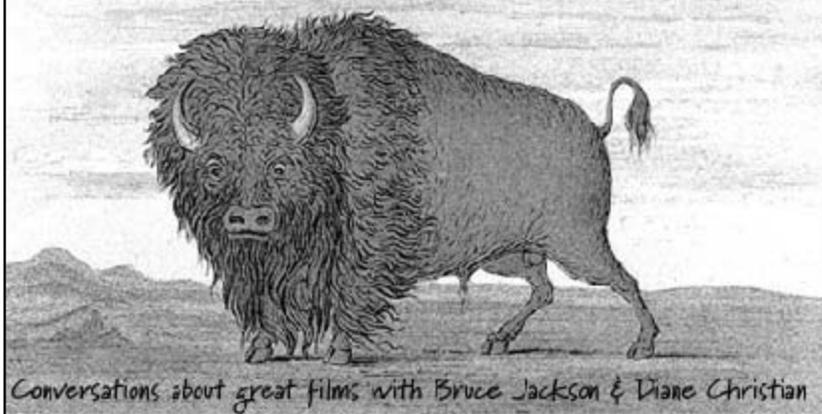


The Buffalo Film Seminars



TARZAN AND HIS MATE (1934, MGM, 116 minutes)

Directed by Cedric Gibbons and Jack Conway (co-director, uncredited)

Writing Edgar Rice Burroughs
characters, Leon Gordon and Howard Emmet Rogers
adaptation, James Kevin McGuinness
screenplay

Produced by Bernard H. Hyman

Cinematography Charles G. Clarke and Clyde De Vinna

Film Editing Tom Held

Art Direction A. Arnold Gillespie

Special Effects James Basevi

Photographic Visual Effects Irving G. Ries (uncredited)

Johnny Weissmuller Tarzan

Maureen O'Sullivan Jane Parker

Neil Hamilton Harry Holt

Paul Cavanagh Martin Arlington

Forrester Harvey Beamish

Nathan Curry Saidi

Ray Corrigan double: Johnny

Weissmuller (uncredited)

George Emerson.... double: Johnny

Weissmuller (uncredited)

Josephine McKim double: Maureen O'Sullivan when swimming (uncredited)

Bert Nelson double: Johnny Weissmuller (uncredited)

Betty Roth double: Maureen O'Sullivan in retakes (uncredited)

Alfred Codona and The Flying Codonas doubles for Johnny Weissmuller and Maureen O'Sullivan when tree jumping (uncredited)

CEDRIC GIBBONS: 23 March 1893, Dublin, Ireland—26 July 1960, Hollywood. This is the only film directed by Cedric Gibbons, and he only directed the first few weeks of it. Most of the work was done by Jack Conway, who wasn't credited on the film.

Gibbons is best known as an art director for MGM

films. He is the most important and influential art director in American film. He did

1500 of them, he designed the Oscar statuette, he was nominated for 37 Oscars and won it 11 times. Some of his more famous films: *Lust for Life* (1956), *High Society* (1956), *Forbidden Planet* (1956), *Blackboard Jungle* (1955), *Bad Day at Black Rock* (1955), *Brigadoon* (1954), *Singin' in the Rain* (1952), *An American in Paris*, (1951), *The Asphalt Jungle* (1950), *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1945), *The Thin Man* (1934), *Grand Hotel* (1932), and *The Unwritten Code* (1919).

JACK CONWAY (17 July 1887, Graceland, MN—11 October 1952, Pacific Palisades, Ca.) directed about 100 films, most of them unnotable. Three of the better known are *The Hucksters* (1947), *Saratoga* (1937), *A Tale of Two Cities* (1935). His first was *Her Indian Hero* (1912).

JOHNNY WEISSMUELLER. 2 June 1904, Freidorf, Banat, Austrian Empire [now Romania]—20 January 1984, Acapulco (stroke). Starred in 12 Tarzan films. IMDB bio: "Johnny Weissmuller was educated at the University of Chicago. A sickly child, he took up swimming on the advice of a doctor. He became a six-three 190 pound champion athlete: undefeated winner of five Olympic gold medals, 67 world and 52 national titles, holder of every freestyle record from 100 yards to the half-mile. In his first picture, *Glorifying the American Girl* (1929), he appeared as an Adonis clad only in a figleaf.... Cyril Hume working on the adaptation of *Tarzan the Ape Man* (1932), noticed Weissmuller swimming in the pool at his hotel and suggested him for the part of Tarzan. Weissmuller was under contract with BVD to model underwear and swimsuits; MGM got him released by agreeing to pose

many of its female stars in BVD swimsuits. They billed him as 'the only man in Hollywood who's natural in the flesh and can act without clothes' *Tarzan the Ape Man* (1932) was an immediate boxoffice and critical hit. Seeing he was popular with girls, the studio told him to divorce his wife and paid her \$10,000 to agree with it. After 1942 MGM had



used up its options; it dropped Tarzan and Weissmuller who then moved to RKO and made six more Tarzans. After that he made sixteen programmed Jungle Jim (1948) movies for Columbia, finally retiring from movies to private businesses in Fort Lauderdale FL.” There’s a story that when he was buried, a recording of his Tarzan yell was played as the coffin was lowered into the ground.

MAUREEN O’SULLIVAN. 17 May 1911, Boyle, County Roscommon, Ireland—23 June 1998, Scottsdale, AZ (heart attack). Bio from *Leonard Maltin’s Movie Encyclopedia*: “This adorable Irish colleen was discovered by American director Frank Borzage at a Dublin horse show shortly after coming out of a convent school, and starred for him in the John McCormack vehicle *Song o’ My Heart* (1930). A few years later she was signed by MGM, where she spent the bulk of her screen career playing virginal ingenues, and had substantial secondary roles in such classics as *David Copperfield*, *Anna Karenina* (both 1935) and *Pride and Prejudice* (1940), not to mention *The Marx Brothers’ A Day at the Races* (1937). She is best remembered, however, as Jane, the mate of jungle lord Tarzan, a role she first played with Johnny Weissmuller in *Tarzan, the Ape Man* (1932) and then reprised five more times, evolving in terms of costume (from pre-Production Code scanties to a modified Mother Hubbard) and role (becoming stepmother to Boy). She left the screen for several years in 1942 to raise a family with her husband, director John Farrow. O’Sullivan returned to films as Ray Milland’s wife in Farrow’s taut thriller *The Big Clock* (1948), and landed some more interesting parts in the 1950s. She was also a cohost of the “Today” show on television in 1963. Infrequently seen on the big screen over the last three decades, she has taken a few colorful supporting roles, most notably in *Hannah and Her Sisters* (1986), a Woody Allen film that costarred her daughter Mia Farrow.

from *5001 Nights at the Movies: A Guide from A to Z*. Pauline Kael

Tarzan and His Mate (1934)—Johnny Weissmuller and Maureen O’Sullivan in the carefully prepared follow-up to the 1932 hit, *Tarzan, the Ape Man*. It’s cheerful and outrageously preposterous. You are right in the heart of the craziest Africa ever conceived for your entertainment; no wild beast ever misses a cue. Tarzan’s mate has adapted herself to her husband’s mode of living with true Victorian propriety; snug in her tree houses, she has a devoted gorilla for her personal maid. Everything is idyllic, though some old Mayfair friends of hers turn up and make trouble for a while....

Carl F. Macek, *Magill’s American Film Guide* v. 5. Edited by Frank N. Magill

The character of Tarzan, Edgar Rice Burroughs’ famed lord of the jungle, has been a screen personality since 1918. Through numerous actors from Elmo Lincoln to Ron Ely, the noble jungle lord has been portrayed by an army of ex-athletes and body-builders. However, to a great many people the actor who most epitomized Tarzan was Olympic champion swimmer Johnny Weissmuller. So completely did he capture the public’s imagination as Tarzan that he played the role through twelve feature films spanning a twelve-year period. In film after film Weissmuller would rise to the occasion as hero supreme, an embodiment of strength, courage, and virtue on the purest level.

Tarzan, the Ape Man was a first not only because of Weissmuller’s portrayal of Tarzan, but also because it introduced the lord of the jungle to the “talking cinema.” This spectacular 1932 M-G-M production was the first sound version of Burrough’s famed creation.

...In the beginning of the film, Tarzan comes upon a safari headed by James Parker (C. Aubrey

The authenticity of the jungle scenes depicted in *Tarzan, the Ape Man* is easy to explain. The film was directed by Willard van Dyke, who had served in the same capacity a year earlier on the epic adventure film, *Trader Horn*. That film, starring Harry Carey, was the first to be shot entirely on location in Africa. *Tarzan, the Ape Man* utilized out-takes from Van Dyke’s earlier film and blended them with remarkable

Smith). This group of travelers is shocked at the presence of a white man living in the jungle in barbaric fashion. Tarzan befriends this safari and becomes attracted to Parker’s daughter, Jane (Maureen O’Sullivan). In order to protect the safari, Tarzan fights many beasts barehanded and concludes each victory with a wild, animalistic cry. He is able to communicate with many of the animals in the jungle, and he uses this ability to gather useful information and eventually rescue the safari from a village of hostile African tribesmen. The intrigues which develop in the course of the safari are of little real consequence to Tarzan, who perceives the world in a very precise way. To him there are no explanations; there is only good, which he defends, and evil, which he battles. He trusts man as he trusts animals, but man, unfortunately, is not always as honest as the denizens of the jungle. His triumph against overwhelming odds at the end of the film and his desire for Jane to remain in the jungle as his mate form a touching conclusion to the film.

skill to match the Hollywood sets constructed for his new motion picture. Weissmuller did many of his own stunts in the film. Although his acting may seem stiff at times during *Tarzan, the Ape Man*, Weissmuller appeared totally natural swimming through rivers teeming with crocodiles or wrestling with huge jungle cats.

The sequel to Weissmuller’s first film is

regarded as one of the most beautiful adventure films ever made. *Tarzan and His Mate* (1934) is a lyrical film which expresses the beauty and danger of the jungle; it is a romance of the highest order.

Remarkably, Weismuller somehow lost whatever awkwardness he had as an actor, and played Burrough's character with grace and charm. He *became* Tarzan, even if his characterization was completely at odds with Burrough's original intelligent hero.

The cinema tended to characterize Tarzan as the embodiment of the noble savage, a man freed from the constraints of civilization whose goal is to live life to its fullest. Burroughs had a different character in mind when he wrote his Tarzan novels. His creation was a king of the jungle, rich powerful, and intelligent, a man of complex goals and desires. He was in control of a vast empire. This characterization was never

captured on film except in a serial produced by Burroughs himself entitled *The New Adventures of Tarzan*, released in 1936 and starring Herman Brix (Bruce Bennett) as the jungle lord.

As Weismuller continued his role as Tarzan, the plots became more fantastic, and a sense of humor and self-parody crept into his later films. . . .

The impact of the Tarzan films on the overall process of film history is arguable. They presented no major innovations; they were simply entertainments with basic plots and fast-paced action. Their impact was more cultural than substantial. In the 1930's Tarzan provided an escape, and by the 1940s these films reflected the exoticism that had invaded Hollywood. *Tarzan, the Ape Man* and its sequel *Tarzan and His Mate* are a fascinating reminder that life was once much simpler and more exciting.

from Houdini Tarzan and the Perfect Man The White Male Body and the Challenge of Modernity in America. John F. Kasson. Hill & Wang 2001

In March 1912, at the beginning of his career as a popular author, Edgar Rive Burroughs wrote to a magazine editor with his latest idea for a yarn:

The story I am on now is of the scion of a noble English house—of the present time—who was born in tropical Africa where his parents died when he was about a year old. The infant was found and adopted by a huge she-ape, and was brought up among a band of fierce anthropoids.

The mental development of this ape-man in spite of every handicap of how he learned to read English without knowledge of the spoken language, of the way in which his inherent reasoning faculties lifted him high above his savage jungle friends and enemies, of his meeting with a white girl, how he came at past to civilization and to his own [,] makes fascinating writing and I think will prove interesting reading, as I am especially adapted to the building of the “damphool” species of narrative.

It was, the editor replied, a “crackerjack” idea. “You certainly have the most remarkable imagination.”

When Burroughs wrote *Tarzan of the Apes* he was thirty-six years old, married with two young children, and living in Chicago, the city of his birth. He was a sturdy though not especially imposing man, roughly five feet nine inches tall, with strong arms and hands. Far from living a life of rugged individualism, he worked in a minor position, giving professional advice to clients for *System*, “The Magazine of Business.” “I knew little or nothing about business,” Burroughs later recalled, “had failed in every enterprise I had ever attempted and could not have given valuable advice to a peanut vendor.” . . .

Burroughs thus wrote *Tarzan* as an act of self-liberation. He hoped to cast off the humiliations of a frustrated, insignificant white-collar worker for the independence of a commercial author with a mass

readership. But more than a means of merely making money, the story, he hoped, would serve as an imaginative escape for himself and his readers. After he had become one of the most widely read (if never the highest paid) writers of his day, he made this point explicit. Speaking of the appeal of the Tarzan stories, he declared:

We wish to escape not alone the narrow confines of city streets for the freedom of the wilderness, but the restrictions of man made laws, and the inhibitions society has placed upon us. We like to picture ourselves as roaming free, the lords of ourselves and of our world; in other words, we would each like to be Tarzan. At least I would; I admit it.

Tarzan was the exemplary fictitious feral child of Burrough's and his readers' time—as he has remained for the ninety years since.

The story appeals powerfully to the fantasy of a reunion with the natural world and hence with one's authentic self.

Burroughs intended *Tarzan of the Apes* as a romantic adventure story, not as a formal meditation on civilization and its discontents. Nevertheless, his tale gave powerful narrative force to a widespread sense that modern technological civilization created restrictions, frustrations, ordinariness that entailed special losses for men. Like Wister and London, Theodore Roosevelt and Frederick Jackson Turner in his own times, and like earlier American writers such as James Fenimore Cooper, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and Herman Melville, Burroughs celebrated untamed masculine individualism. More particularly, he created in Tarzan a figure who embodied the enduring impulse, in Emerson's words, to “enjoy an original relation to the universe,” to raw nature, with all its primal anarchic force. The desire for unmediated contact with nature and occasions to

test oneself against it constitutes an overriding element of American masculine identity. It is hardly surprising that in the early twentieth century, when an increasingly impersonal, bureaucratic, and corporate society dominated the everyday life of individual citizens, that desire flared with new brightness and new heat.

What is more problematic in Burrough's story and in the works of many of his contemporaries is that this assertion of masculine wildness is often explicitly tied to whiteness. Earlier writers were hardly free from bigotry, but to a notable extent writers such as Emerson and Thoreau at least tried to put their affirmations of individual wildness in the service of democratic inclusiveness and against systems of oppression, of which slavery was the most glaring and hateful. In Burroughs's *Tarzan* as in Wister's *The Virginian*, however, all men are not created equal. True, Tarzan does not depend on outward hereditary privilege; indeed, the book ends with his refusing to claim his title and estate. As a self-made man, he could appeal to many readers. Yet Burroughs, in line with the predominant thought of influential whites of his time, believed that Tarzan carries his most valuable hereditary privilege, his innate superiority, in his very blood. He could be strengthened rather than degraded by the wild precisely because he holds the best of Western civilization within him. Others less favored by heredity, such as the African natives and atavistic crew members, in Burroughs's eyes do not.

If for Burroughs and his readers wildness enhanced white Anglo-Saxons but debased black Africans, it also enhanced masculinity—but not, in the same way, femininity. Tarzan's murmured statement to Jane in the story's concluding pages, "I am still a

wild beast at heart," is as much a reassurance as a warning. His wildness is the basis of his virility, power and authority, and for him to become truly civilized. To lock himself within the "iron cage" of modern capitalist society, would be tantamount to emasculation. With Jane, it is another story. Burroughs allows her to submit to her awakened primal passions only in fleeting and fantastic moments. Perhaps he senses that to make her as wild as Tarzan would be to replace her teasing oscillation between submission and resistance with an independent sexuality less acceptable to his readers and, perhaps, to himself. The metamorphosis that accompanied moving between civilization and the wild remained, above all, a masculine performance.

A succession of film versions powered the Tarzan machine, beginning with the release of the first *Tarzan of the Apes* in January 1918. With a coordinated publicity campaign of film distribution, newspaper serialization, and book sales, the movie proved one of the most profitable in the history of the nascent industry, and sales of Burroughs's books soared. . .

For a quarter century, from 1914 to 1939, Burroughs turned out a new Tarzan book virtually every year. In failing health, he produced his last in 1947, three years before his death. During his lifetime he also published eleven Martian adventures, four stories set on Venus, six "Pellucidar" tales taking place within Earth, several Westerns, and numerous other works. "I want to be known as Edgar Rice Burroughs the author, not Edgar Rice Burroughs the author of *Tarzan*," he declared, but he never truly got his wish.